



DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
P R E S S R E L E A S E

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**FILIPINO TRAVELERS WARNED AGAINST
INVOLVEMENT IN DRUG TRAFFICKING**

12 August 2008—Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), including seafarers, and Filipino nationals traveling overseas are strongly advised to take necessary precautions to avoid involvement in the smuggling or trafficking of narcotics and illicit drugs.

International criminal syndicates operating in the Philippines, China (including Hong Kong and Macau), Malaysia, Thailand, India, Pakistan, Turkey, and other countries in Asia, Middle East, and South America have victimized unsuspecting Filipino travelers and have also succeeded in recruiting Filipino nationals to work as drug couriers or "mules".

These criminal syndicates employ Africans and various Asian nationals, including Filipinos, who try to convince unsuspecting travelers to carry luggage or parcels containing narcotics. The syndicates also try to recruit travelers (especially those who are in need of money) to work for them as drug couriers or "mules".

Travelers, tourists, or OFWs are approached by members of criminal syndicates and are offered attractive amounts of cash if they will carry luggage or parcels for delivery to a certain person at their point of destination. These items of luggage or parcels invariably contain narcotics or illicit drugs.

In other instances, Filipino travelers are recruited as drug couriers or "mules" and are paid to carry narcotics or illicit drugs by concealing these items in their clothing. Other couriers or "mules" ingest or swallow small packets of narcotics or illicit drugs or insert these inside their body cavities.

From January to July this year, 116 Filipino travelers were intercepted and arrested at various airports in other countries for drug trafficking, as follows: China (including Hong Kong and Macau) - 52; Middle East - 19; other Asian countries - 8; United States - 7; Latin America - 20; and, Europe - 10.

Filipino travelers should be aware that improved customs examination and law enforcement capabilities (particularly in drug trafficking) in many countries, as well as expanding international cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking, is helping many countries intercept narcotics and illicit drugs at ports of entry.

Filipino travelers should also be aware that most countries impose harsh penalties for drug smuggling or trafficking. Persons arrested and

convicted for drug smuggling or trafficking can expect a lengthy prison sentence, at the very least. In many countries, the maximum penalty of life imprisonment can be imposed for this crime. In some countries, drug smuggling or trafficking is a capital offense with the maximum penalty of death.

Filipino nationals are urged to exercise caution in their travels overseas and to report any incident involving offers such as those indicated above to the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA), Hotline No. 920-0967 (if they are in the Philippines) or to the nearest Philippine Embassy or Consulate (if they are overseas). END

